

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES.

*A History of British Birds.* By WILLIAM YARRELL, V.P.L.S., F.Z.S. Fourth Edition, revised and enlarged: Vols. I. & II. by ALFRED NEWTON, M.A., F.R.S.; Vols. III. & IV. by HOWARD SAUNDERS, F.L.S., F.Z.S., &c. (Van Voorst.)

OF the works on ornithology which have recently appeared none will be hailed with greater satisfaction than the new edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' which has recently been brought to a successful conclusion. The first edition of this standard authority was completed in 1843, a second and third being subsequently issued, the last in 1856: both of them little more than reproductions, with additions, of the original.

In 1871 the publisher, with a due appreciation of the great advance which had been made in ornithological knowledge, determined to bring out a fourth edition of this deservedly popular work, embodying the information subsequently acquired. In these days, however, to edit a work of this nature is no mean task, and requires an ornithologist of the highest ability for its performance. It is not merely a repetition of previous editions, with perhaps an editorial footnote here and there, but a careful revision of the whole that has to be done. Every bird's history has to be brought up to date; the evidence upon which some of the rarer species have been—perhaps too hastily—admitted to a place in the British avifauna has to be carefully weighed, and the claims of numerous aspirants to the honour minutely sifted. Indeed, owing to the numerous importations which now take place, the decision as to whether a bird is a truly wild one or has merely escaped—in other words, whether it reached this country with or without the aid of man—is one of the most unsatisfactory duties that can fall to the lot of an editor. Moreover, the mass of literature that has to be digested, scattered as it is through numerous publications, is enough to appal any but the stoutest heart. That this was not lost sight of is evident from the fact of the work being entrusted to the first-named editor, than whom no one more competent to undertake the task could have been found.

Bearing in mind the systems with which the public have become more or less familiar, we think that to have made violent changes in the arrangement, or in any other material point, would have been attended with risk of diminishing the utility of the work; and we therefore consider that in adhering, in the main, to the sequence of the preceding edition, Prof. Newton exercised a wise discretion. Not that there are no changes; far from it. For instance, the old-fashioned and non-scientific reader will be astonished to find that the Swifts (Cypselidæ) are no longer placed with the Swallows (Hirundinidæ) nor the Golden Oriole with the Thrushes—the former having been removed from the Passeres to the Picariæ, and the latter from the Merulidæ to the Oriolidæ. These and several other changes of a similar nature have been rendered imperatively necessary by the light of modern research. With regard to this

last-named species, it may be mentioned that while the work was passing through the press the first authenticated cases of its breeding in the Isle of Thanet occurred in 1874 and 1875, as recorded in 'The Field' of those years.

The first two volumes include the Accipitres, Passeres, and Picariæ. There are no very great changes in the first Order, but two species of the large Northern Falcons are admitted as British in place of the so-called Gyr-Falcon of former editions; and the Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) is figured and described as a rare visitant—a great deal of fresh information being added with regard to these and other species. In the Passeres we find the following additions:—*Muscicapa parva*, *Lanius minor*, *Turdus atrigularis*, *Acrocephalus aquaticus*, *Anthus spipoletta* and *A. campestris*, *Melanocorypha sibirica*, *Euspiza melanocephala*, *Emberiza rustica* and *E. pusilla*, *Serinus hortulanus*, and *Pyrrhula erythrina*: all upon evidence that cannot be disputed, besides additional matter concerning many others. Not the least startling feature is the amalgamation of the Black Crow (*C. corone*) and Hooded Crow (*C. cornix*) into one species, regarding which much diversity of opinion exists in ornithological circles. Another is the elimination from the British list of the Black Woodpecker (*Picus martius*) in default of any satisfactory evidence of the occurrence of that species in the British Islands.

When these two volumes had been finished, Professor Newton was compelled by circumstances to relinquish the editorship; the somewhat invidious task of succeeding such an author being, with becoming public spirit, undertaken by Mr. Howard Saunders, whose name has long been specially connected with the Laridæ; and here, again, the publisher is to be congratulated on having secured the services of so able an ornithologist. The two volumes under his charge—commencing with the Columbidae and ending with the Anseres—comprise some extremely interesting additions to the British list. Amongst them may be noticed the Sand-Grouse (*Syr-rhaptus paradoxus*), whose irruptions into these islands in 1859 and 1863 must still be fresh in the memory of all who are interested in birds; the Great Black-headed Gull (*Larus ichthyaëtus*); the Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus fuliginosus*); the Flamingo (*Phœnicopterus roseus*), whose strange manner of nesting is depicted in the wood-cut at the head of the article; and the Snow-Goose (*Chen hyperboreus*). As an instance of the increase of our knowledge it may be observed that at the date of the last edition the nidification of the Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus candidus*) was so imperfectly known that Hewitson only tells us that this bird "lays its eggs upon the ground," while doubting that it lays as many as four; and Yarrell does not even commit himself to the former assertion. Its nesting is now fully described, and, curiously enough, it seems that, contrary to the habits of its neighbour the Avocet, and of the Plovers generally, which lay their eggs in a hollow, this bird sometimes, although not usually, builds a raised nest—a miniature Flamingo's in fact—a habit rendered necessary, we imagine, by the situation selected, on the mud by the margins of lakes.

Amongst the birds which are no longer to be found in this work

are the Virginian Colin (*Ortyx virginianus*) and the Barbary Partridge (*Caccabis petrosa*), both of them introduced species which have failed to establish themselves in this country. Any one who reads between the lines can see that Mr. Saunders, from his personal knowledge of its habits, is sceptical as to the genuineness of the recorded occurrences of the Andalusian Hemipode, a species not given to wandering, not found in Malta or France, and so restricted in its habitat that even in Spain and Sicily it is only found in certain southern districts. The so-called "Sabine's Snipe" is now generally regarded as a melanic variety, and has been expunged from the list, although the beautiful original woodcut, remarkable even amongst others for its execution, has been retained as a tailpiece.

A new illustration is given of the Rosy or Cuneate-tailed Gull; and there is also one to show the adult plumage of the Pomatorhine Skua, only the immature stage having previously been figured. The Masked Gull (*Larus capistratus*) is no longer considered a valid species, nor does the editor admit the claims of the American Laughing Gull (*L. atricilla*) to a place in the British list. In the article on the Fulmar Petrel it is pointed out, for the first time, that the young birds of the pale form are similar in plumage to the adults, and that the grey birds, which were formerly supposed to represent the intermediate stage, are not the young of the above, but belong to a distinct dark form. The Ringed Guillemot is degraded from its former specific rank; and it is clear that if Mr. Saunders had been writing a book entirely his own, such species (admitted by Yarrell) as the Polish Swan, the Canada, Spur-winged, and Egyptian Geese, and more than one Duck, would have been omitted.

In a short Preface placed at the commencement of the third volume Mr. Saunders gives his reasons for certain changes in the systematic arrangement which he considers to be unavoidable consistently with the present state of our knowledge. In former editions the order Limicolæ was split in two, the præcocial Plovers being separated from the equally præcocial Snipes, Sandpipers, &c. by the Herons &c., whose young are helpless for some time after they are hatched; the Phalaropes were placed next to the Rails, and the whole of the above and some other genera were comprised in one huge impossible Order—Grallatores. The Gulls and Terns, now admitted to be so closely allied to the Limicolæ that it is doubtful whether they ought not to form part of that order, were classed with Ducks &c. as Natatores; and the Petrels, now known to have little in common with the Gulls but a superficial resemblance, were actually placed among the Laridæ! All this is now altered, and, as we believe, very much for the better, although there will doubtless be some grumblers who will not take the trouble to refer to the capital index, and complain that they "never know where to look for a bird now."

The entire work has been so thoroughly well executed that we have no hesitation in stating that it will maintain its place as the standard

book of reference on British birds, alike on the book-shelf of the student and in the library of the country gentleman, for many years to come.

*Russian Central Asia.* By HENRY LANSDELL, D.D. In two volumes. 8vo. London, 1885.

ZOOLOGISTS will experience much satisfaction in finding in a work, the author of which does not claim to be a naturalist, unexpectedly a source of information which is all the more welcome as it refers to a part of the globe that claims our attention in an unusual degree. We sadly missed in Dr. Lansdell's first work, 'Through Siberia,' information as to the natural productions of that remote region, and could not help feeling that an opportunity had been lost. This is in some measure remedied in this new work on Russian Central Asia. It forms two large volumes, handsomely illustrated with seventy engravings and maps.

The bulk of the work is occupied by the author's record of his journey of 12,000 miles through Western Siberia to Kuldja, thence through the Kirghese steppes to Tashkend, Khokand, and Samarkand. Crossing into Bokhara he travelled to the Oxus, down which he floated 300 miles to Khiva, and then continued by a new route across the land of the Turkomans and north of Merv to Krasnovotsk. As province by province of Russian Central Asia are described, their several faunas and floras are shortly characterized; but the most important part of the information is contained in the appendices at the end of the second volume, which extend to about 150 pages of closely but clearly printed matter.

Concerning the fauna of Russian Turkestan Dr. Lansdell, after pointing out that until within the last thirty years Turkestan was all but unknown to science, gives a brief account of the various naturalists who have proceeded there—amongst whom the first place is very properly given to Professor A. P. Fedchenko, whose work, written in Russian, is unfortunately a closed book to the majority of English naturalists.

Thanks to help which Dr. Lansdell has received, the introductions to the various portions of Fedchenko's collection are translated and supplemented by lists of the species, so that the English reader may obtain a good idea of the fauna and flora of the region traversed. Severtzoff's lists of mammals and birds had already been translated, and to these Dr. Lansdell adds those of reptiles and amphibians, giving here, as also with the mammals and birds, both the vertical and horizontal distribution.

We have next the monograph on Turkestan fishes by K. F. Kessler. In the account of the Mollusks the area is extended beyond Turkestan to the Altai, the Trans-Baikal, Afghanistan, Tibet, Cashmir, North-west Himalayas, and Yun-nan. Five pages are devoted to Arachnida, with 146 species, after which follow the Crustaceans and Coleoptera. At the end of this last order Dr. Lansdell